

1999 Annual Report Executive Summary

Chambers County Enterprise Community

The Chambers County Enterprise Community has made outstanding progress in implementing its Benchmarks over the past twelve months. The Community Board had a very good strategic plan, but was slow to begin putting their plan into motion. Part of that was due to a change in employees working with the Enterprise Community through the lead entity, the East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission. The second program facilitator, David (Shaw) Umling, did an exceptional job of organizing the Board and assisting them to make decisions, which consequently resulted in progress on their Benchmarks. The Board, by its own actions, has been limited to 32 members. Often, it is difficult to have that many people agree. They are a diverse group and are a fair representation of the Enterprise Community.

The Enterprise Community probably has not done enough to promote its successes, though what has been reported has been accurately reported. An increased emphasis on this is planned for the coming year. One of the major problems encountered is that the two municipalities in the Enterprise Community and the Chambers County Commission are unable to provide financial support. The financial problems of these entities have made them unwilling or unable to apply for other funds, including those under USDA programs, and that has made it very difficult for the Enterprise Community to leverage funds. The nature of the programs in the strategic plan, most of which are social programs are not conducive to leverage funds. Some local governments originally wanted the EC's federal funds turned over to them for "bricks and mortar" items. When they found out the form of the funds, their interest unfortunately declined.

Another problem is that most programs cannot be sustained because operating funds cannot be regenerated. In some cases, the lead entity may agree to accept responsibility for future maintenance and upkeep. USDA Rural Development personnel are working diligently with the EC to identify possible sources of funding to continue these worthwhile programs after the EC funds are exhausted. Overall, the Enterprise Community, its Board, and Facilitator are doing a good job, but need to spend more time and effort telling their success stories, which will help generate more local interest.